THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE PROPERTY MASTERS GUILD

PROP CULTURE

FALL 2025

THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAILS:
The Props of *Sinners*

SEVERANCE:
There Is Nothing Regular About This Office

THE *PROP CULTURE* INTERVIEW

CRAIG PERRY:
The *Final Destination* Producer on Collaboration in Storytelling

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON
The Property Department Shapes the Look of the Film

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PROP CULTURE

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COVER: ***Sinners.*** **Photo courtesy of Warner Bros.**

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Whether you are flipping through this on the back of a prop trailer, over coffee at 5 a.m., or between resets, welcome to issue four of *Prop Culture*. To our returning readers, thank you for your continued support, and to our new subscribers, we are glad you are here. *Prop Culture* was created to celebrate the people who build stories from the background forward, fabricators, buyers, masters, and assistants alike. What began as a passion project has grown into a platform shaped by working professionals across the industry. This is your magazine.

Before diving into this issue, a quick note: Due to an editorial error, a portion of our interview with LaToya Morgan in issue three referencing *Duster* and Property Master Ross Anderson was omitted from print. We correct that here and extend our congratulations to Ross and his team for their outstanding work on the 1970's period HBO series and their dedication to crafting authentic, story-driven props.

PMG Property Master Catherine Miller takes us inside the eerie world of *Severance,* where every object from stripped down Data General Dashers to oscilloscopes tracking split-consciousness and even a herd of unruly goats was crafted to drive the story and deepen the show's retro-futuristic mystery. Her feature follows the journey from digging through vintage tech in Rhode Island to building functional CRT rigs, designing Mark's iconic face balloon for Apple's marketing, and working with director Ben Stiller to embed clever Easter eggs throughout. In *Severance*, props are not just set dressing, they are the story's pulse.

Prop Culture also dives into the lush, genre-bending world of *Sinners*, Ryan Coogler's bold new period gangster vampire musical, through the eyes of Property Master Douglas Ware. In "The Devil's in the Details," writer Lauren Shell explores how Ware and his team brought 1930's Mississippi to life with remarkable authenticity, crafting everything from WWI weaponry and mojo bags to garlic props and street dressing that subtly reflects the era's racial divide. The result is a vivid look at how meticulous prop work helped shape one of the year's most inventive and visually stunning films.

Finally, this month's *Prop Culture* Interview spotlights producer Craig Perry, whose passion for collaboration and respect for behind-the-scenes artistry have shaped some of the most iconic film franchises of the past 25 years. From *Final Destination: Bloodlines* to *American Pie*, Craig reflects on the essential role of props in building story, tone, and authenticity. In a candid and often hilarious conversation, he shares how creative problem-solving and attention to detail elevate filmmaking, and why the Property Department remains one of the most vital voices on set.

Alongside our features, this issue continues the columns our readers love. "Ask the Experts" returns with practical wisdom straight from the field, and "Dear Theresa and Scott," our advice column, brings its usual blend of warmth, wit, and perspective to the chaos of crew life. Our recurring segment, "Scene Stealers," highlights the props you did not know you could not stop thinking about, the subtle objects that grabbed the spotlight and walked away with the scene.

Thank you for reading. Thank you for subscribing. And thank you for doing what you do.

Sincerely,
Scott A. Buckwald, PMG and
Theresa Corvino, PMG

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DAVID CHEESMAN

DAVID CHEESMAN/*HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON*

David Cheesman, PMG started out as an actor for many years and then chose to go behind the camera as his father was a property man on such films as *A Clockwork Orange* and *Where Eagles Dare*; his brother on *Indiana Jones*, *Return to Oz*, and later, all the *Harry Potter* films as the Storeman. David started out with films such as *Sex and the City 2, Kingsman, Jupiter Ascending Mission: Impossible*, and most recently, Martin McDonagh's new film, *Wild Horse Nine*.

CATHERINE MILLER

CATHERINE MILLER/*SEVERANCE*

Catherine Miller, PMG is a NYC-based, MacGuffin Award-nominated Property Master. She has keyed more than 17 projects collaborating closely with Ben Stiller, the Safdie brothers, and Derek Cianfrance among others. Before finding her way into motion pictures, Miller enjoyed an extensive dance career ranging from international touring companies to the Metropolitan Opera and was the Director of Summer Dance Programming at her alma mater, UNC School of the Arts. She is inspired daily by her husband, Jose, and their epically awesome son, Matteo.

LAUREN SHELL

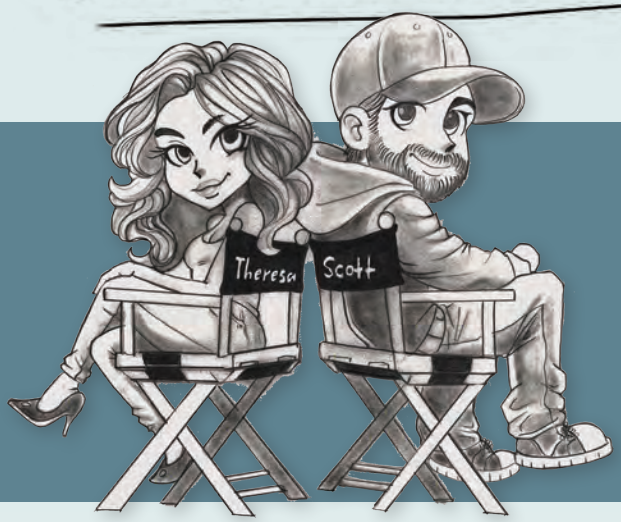
LAUREN SHELL/*SINNERS*

Lauren Shell began her career in Hollywood back in 2013 as a miniaturist working for New Deal Studios on *Interstellar*. After a few years of building miniatures, she made the jump from shop to set when she became the Property Master for *Dave Made a Maze* in 2015. In just over a decade in the industry, she's had the privilege of working with some legendary actors from Michael Keaton and Al Pacino to Jane Fonda and Patton Oswald. Having mastered almost every genre of film, Lauren is looking forward to the opportunity of working on television in the near future.

THE PMG MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE/ASK THE EXPERTS

The Committee is made up of PMG active member volunteers working in a range of television, features and commercials. They review incoming PMG applications and onboard new members. They make sure our members are represented through the PMG, events, and initiatives around the world. The Committee is made up of collective work of the Committee Chair Michael Trudel (Los Angeles, Boston) and the Committee members: Tasha Moth (Los Angeles, Vancouver), Colin Bach (Chicago), Jamie Connolly (Los Angeles), Andy Siegel (Los Angeles), Kurt Bruun (Vancouver), Hunter Nelson (Los Angeles), and Ryan Gargiulo (New York).

Dear Theresa and Scott



Is life in the biz getting you down? Do you sometimes feel overwhelmed or not know where to turn? There's no need for you to suffer alone. Theresa and Scott want to help. They're right here for you in the pages of *Prop Culture*!

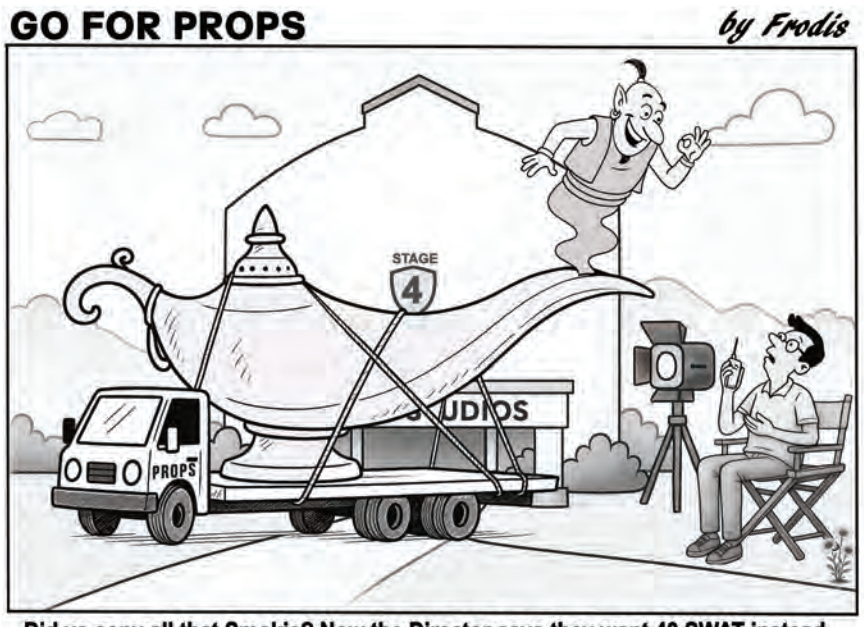
Dear Theresa and Scott,
Where do I even begin?

I'm currently working as the Property Assistant/truck person on an episodic action series shooting just outside of Atlanta. We're in our third season, and by all accounts, this has been a dream job: fantastic crew, incredible cast, and I genuinely enjoy working for the Property Master. Well, almost. Here's the thing. Everyone loves the Property Master. The producers, the production designer, the cast all adore him. There's a noticeable lift in energy whenever the Property Master walks on set. And I get it. The Property Master is talented, charming, and passionate about the work. But behind the scenes? Our property trailer is a disaster zone. Drawers are jammed shut with broken slides. Plastic crates with most lids long gone are crammed with everything from police gear to art supplies to call sheets from shows long forgotten. Paperwork and colored script pages are stuffed in every corner and empty coffee cups seem to be fossilized in and under everything.

The trailer is dimly lit with old fluorescent tubes, and I cannot begin to tell you the terror that are the jockey boxes. I've revived this trailer more times than I can count. I've sorted, labeled, purged, and reorganized bringing order to madness. Each time, I think *maybe this time it'll stick*. And each time, within a few days, we're back where we were. The funny thing is that each time I clean and organize the trailer, the Property Master genuinely thanks me. They've even playfully admitted that organization isn't their strength. I've tried raising the issue, but the conversation never seems to lead anywhere. Other members of the department, some who have been working off this trailer for many years, tell me just give up, that things will never change. How do I get through to the Property Master that I work hard to keep the trailer cleaned and organized and I am on my last nerve that no matter how hard I try, the trailer always seems to be a totally messy and disorganized disaster?

Signed, Working My Fingers
to the Bone

Dear Boney Fingers,
You are not going to like our answer. Deal with it. Okay, let's flush this out a bit because we do have column space to fill, and clearly you are distressed over this situation. The first issue is, as far as the Property Master is concerned, why tamper with success? Do we sympathize with you? Absolutely, 100 percent. But it is important to remember this is not your trailer, and you are not the department head. You can offer suggestions, lead by example, and show how your approach might make things more efficient or visually organized, but ultimately, these decisions are not yours to make. If the Property Master had specifically tasked you with maintaining the trailer and then regularly undid your efforts, that would be a different conversation. But since this is something, you have taken on yourself, the frustration unfortunately comes with the territory. So yes, you will need to find a way to manage this dynamic with professionalism and patience. This may also be indicative of other issues of disorganization and logistical ability, which in time you will start to pick up from other members of the Property Department. However, we would also strongly advise against venting behind the Property Master's back. That kind of behavior is not only unprofessional, but it can also erode trust quickly. Some things are best addressed directly or kept within the team, with respect and discretion. You sound like a real asset to your department. Do the best job you can do, and no one can ask for more.



Did ya copy all that Smokie? Now the Director says they want 40 SWAT instead of 10 and the 5 people at the Boston flower shop should be at an outdoor cafe having pizza in New York!

Dear Theresa and Scott,

I'm a Property Assistant for film and TV based in Chicago. Like many of us in the crew world, I haven't had steady work in almost a year. I've done some occasional day playing but that is it. I love what I do, and I do have some savings but with the production slowdown, my savings are dwindling, and the job offers just aren't coming. I'm 27 and I have worked in film my entire professional life. The thought of going out and getting a retail job is just soul crushing to me. I keep hearing about side hustles, but honestly, I have no idea where to begin. I'm sure I can find a way to harness my skills. I just don't know how to translate them into something sustainable outside of film. I could really use some guidance. I would look terrible in a Home Depot apron, and I don't know if I could bag groceries without commenting on people's dietary choices. Help!!

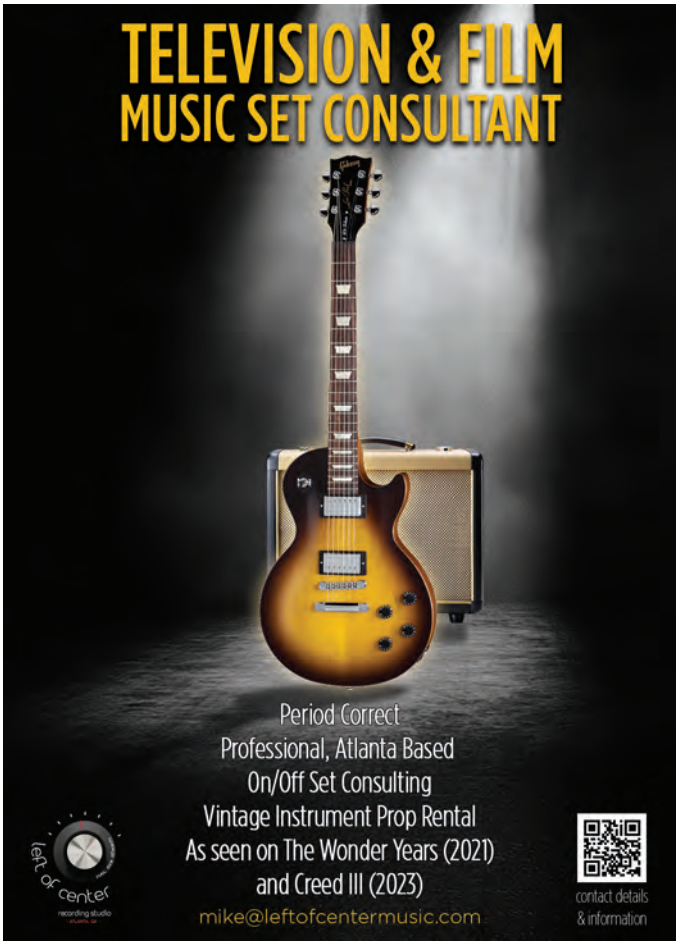
Signed, Would You Like
Fries with That

Dear Fries,

Like everyone else, we too are hoping this production slowdown is only temporary. But something you should be asking yourself, beyond just finding a side hustle, is whether you have what it takes. Unlike previous generations of film production workers who may have been able to work steadily and still put some money aside to support a side hustle, that may not be the case for the younger generation now trying to build a career in film production. We are by no means saying do not do it. Just know what you are getting yourself into. Film production is a calling, and it can be one of the most rewarding and fun careers anyone can hope for, but it also takes a strong mindset and now more than ever, a real dedication and awareness of the state of the industry. From your letter, it seems you may very well have what it takes to get through this. You are lucky to have some savings to rely on. It is a reminder of how crucial it is in our industry to build an emergency fund from day one. Work slowdowns are not new. There have been writer, actor, and director strikes, economic dips, tax incentive-driven production shifts, and even a global pandemic. Even in the best of times, planning for a month or two between long-term jobs is a wise decision. You are right to acknowledge your skills. Now let's see if we can put them to work. Many Property Masters and assistants we know side hustle in creative ways: selling handmade crafts or refinished furniture at flea markets, flipping vinyl records at shows, or offloading valuable items from storage. If you are handy with Photoshop, photo restoration is always in demand. Light home repair, painting, wiring switches, and other basic home fix-it skills can keep you booked solid if neighbors know you are available. Your prop-making skills translate well to Etsy, eBay, and craft fairs. Spread the word through social media and your local network. Your skills are your secret weapon, and certainly working long hours should not scare you. Take a deep breath. You have more going for you than you realize, and if you can wire a light switch, give us a call.

If you have a problem about any aspect of working in the film business or as a Property Master, just write to us at the address below. Then remember to look here at "Dear Theresa and Scott" for your answer. Even if we don't get to your question, we bet you will always find something that can help! See ya next issue.

Love, Theresa and Scott | *Prop Culture* | editor@propculturemag.com



ASK THE EXPERTS

WHAT IS THE MOST MEMORABLE PROP YOU HAD TO MAKE OR USE FOR A SHOW?

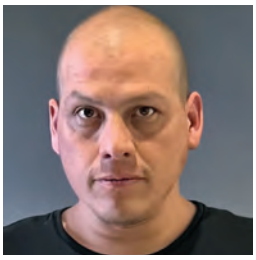
CAROLINE STRATTON – LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

This story always comes to mind. Early in my career, I had a scene involving a young boy who gets lost in the wilderness and finds a berry bush. He eats the berries which make him sick. The director wanted to see him grabbing the berries off the bush, and wanted the berries to not be overly recognizable. He wanted something similar to a goji berry and was insistent that he wanted an insert of the boy grabbing the berries off the bush. We asked around town, but it was not berry season, so we weren't able to find any goji bushes, or any others, with fruit on them. I did a lot of research and ended up buying four goji bushes and some red currants which are sold with little branches still attached, much like grapes. I used a very thin fishing line to tie the tiny currant branches to the goji plants. The child was easily able to grab the berries off the plant without breaking or revealing the rig. They were easy to reset, safe for him to eat, and looked like a simple red berry. I've always been proud of that moment of ingenuity.

CAROLINE STRATTON

ROBERTO PIZARRO NUÑEZ – MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

One of my all-time favorite props to work on was Melquíades's ancient book in our adaptation of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* Season 1. We wrapped it in textured leather and filled every page with Sanskrit calligraphy (huge thanks to our Latin & Sanskrit expert for getting it just right). The lively illustrations really steer the story, and that hefty tome ended up feeling like another cast member on set. I teamed up with an awesome crew—a binder, calligrapher, translator, and illustrators—and spent months perfecting every detail. Watching the actors lose themselves in its pages reminded me why I love this job. It's definitely one of my proudest moments.



ROBERTO PIZARRO NUÑEZ

KEITH WALTERS – ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

Whenever I've been asked about my most memorable prop I've had to come up with, I invariably reply with the bolt cattle gun used by Javier Bardem in the Coen brothers' film *No Country for Old Men*. I've had to come up with props from gatling guns on horseback to Abraham Lincoln's pocketknife, but hands down that odd contraption used by the evil Anton Chigurh is the prize for me. It was a really simple build. The SFX crew milled the actual bolt gun piece. We found a pair of compressed air tanks the right size and weight in a surplus store and connected an air hose from tank to bolt gun, and we had a very scary and unusual device of death.

KEITH WALTERS

DON O'REILLY – NEW YORK, NEW YORK

On *The Blacklist*, a script called for a working Russian M-125 Fialka cipher machine from the Cold War era. We were told there was only one in the States—at a museum in DC—but it would take two weeks of red tape to get it. I needed one in five days. Hours of research and phone calls—all dead ends. Finally, I found a collector in Vermont who had recently picked one up at an auction in Europe. Touchdown!

On the way back from Vermont, I got a call about blue revisions—they now needed two real cipher machines. Luckily, the property gods were on my side that day. The collector had spare parts from another machine. He brought them down, and I built one to match!

DON O'REILLY

–The PMG Membership Committee

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The Jungle Cruise

JORDAN DeVRIES

SPECIALTY PROP PAINTER AND PROP MAKER

Jordan DeVries

With more than 20 years in the game, Jordan has been involved with prop manufacturing at multiple world-class Los Angeles prop shops and a part of some amazing on-set teams too. A memorable moment for Jordan specifically came while working at Studio Art & Technology (SAT) on Disney's *The Jungle Cruise* (Property Master Doug Harlocker).

From many hero and stunt rubber period weapons to hand-painted luggage, treasure maps, and magical flowers, they had quite the workload for the show. Then a specific project came to him involving a guitar for the lead character played by Dwayne Johnson, an adventure-loving riverboat captain. The character had a tattered ol' guitar to strum around the campfire. This challenge is the perfect example of the old adage: "If you only have one, you have none." The Property Department found a beautifully aged guitar but couldn't go into filming without a backup. So, he was given a similar guitar and the challenge to paint it to match the hero. This was a fun challenge to match the wood grain, tone, and age spots as best as he could with such a short turnaround. The finished side-by-side shows how close he got.

Above: The donor guitar and hero to match. Right: After paint, both guitars were identical.

When matching a hero and painting multiples of a specific prop, the hope is that the camera and audience don't notice Jordan was ever "there." After many years of painting for film and TV, he loves getting the opportunity to add his own sliver of creativity to help define characters and add to the film's story.

Remy De La Mora

SALES ASSOCIATE AT HISTORY FOR HIRE, MUSICAL TECH ADVISOR

Specifically, Remy remembers working on *A Complete Unknown* as the moment he realized that he had found a home in the film industry. His background as a writing and performing musician gave him a unique perspective on the mind of the characters. The choices they make often go beyond aesthetics and time period. Bob Dylan's guitar wasn't just another guitar, another prop, that guitar was a message. That guitar was a crucial moment for a character who helped not only define music and shape lyricism for years to come, but someone who defined and then defied an era. He knew they had to get it right.

When the film came out, Remy was at an event where all the costumes and the guitars and microphones were being showcased. He was asked over and again about what they did and what props were ours—how the movie was made and what the process was. He was asked because he had answers. "I had answers … because I was a part of that film. I will proudly admit I shed a tiny tear that night. Here, in Hollywood, along with all the other misfits, I finally made sense." Remy looks forward to being able to continue sharing his knowledge and love of music to help tell the stories we are lucky to tell.

MEET REMY DE LA MORA

A Complete Unknown

SEVERANCE

THERE IS NOTHING REGULAR ABOUT THIS OFFICE

BY CATHERINE MILLER, PMG

Being a part of the Apple TV+ show *Severance*, has been a game changer in how I approach prop mastering a show. I have grown to understand how props, defined as the objects the characters touch, are crucial to driving a story and can also become a driving force in the entire look of a show. The world of *Severance* is built around a specific and unique aesthetic in which everything is considered and nothing exists randomly. I couldn't take anything for granted. Nothing could come off a shelf ready for camera. As a mystery box thriller, the show holds high regard for the intelligence of the audience and cannot underestimate how thoroughly every detail is dissected for clues. As such, the props went far beyond fulfilling any basic need of a scene to contribute strongly to the world, influence the story itself, and even became integral beyond the physical production to the show's marketing.

My introduction to *Severance* was in December of 2019 when I was sent the pilot script, and it read like a typical office drama. However, director and executive producer Ben Stiller, along with production designer Jeremy Hindle were already at work teasing out the look of that "office," forming it into anything but regular. That office was the home of the Lumon Corporation, the main antagonist of the story. In the story, the Lumon Corporation developed a surgical procedure to separate an employee's work memories from their outside life memories. The severed employees work-self, known as "innies," only have memories made in the severed floor they occupy. The corporation seeks to curate everything on this severed work floor for total control of the innies existence. To reflect that, the set design was inspired by Lumon's desire to maximize the employee experience for maximum productivity. Harkening back to a time when office spaces were considered a point of pride, care was taken to design them with a certain style the sets emerged with retro futuristic flare heavily influenced by brutalism and the movie *Playtime*. It was a nod to function meeting form with cohesion.

On the severed floor, our main characters' innies work at desks for the entirety of their existence "refining" numbers on a computer terminal. We started to think about the tech on the severed floor concepting with analog influences to parallel the set design. We wanted to explore seemingly older computer styles, curved screen CRT tubes, and 8-bit animation. This technology on the severed floor has become a hallmark of all the prop design of the series, and it began with the computers.

Ben Stiller lines up a shot on Miss Huang's water toy and computer

It's become a common story that early on in prep, I drove up to see Dan at the Rhode Island Computer Museum who opened the vaults for me. It was a Costco-sized warehouse busting at the seams with stacks of vintage computers. It felt like entering the final scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* with rows of stored computer history. Dan and I spent the day rummaging through all of its treasures, pulling monitors and keyboards with interesting looking shapes. I loaded about 13 models into my minivan and drove back to our stages in New York City. After meticulously scrubbing decades of cigarette smoke and grime off them, they were ready for their lineup, and I for my first real test. Ben, Jeremy, cinematographer Jessica Lee Gagne, art directors, the set decorator, all the producers, the assistants, and people I hadn't even met came in for the big show and tell. There was a communal "geeking out" over the breadth of history that was amassed in the lineup with computers like the old Commodores, IBMs, Wangs, all triggering immediate nostalgia.

Ben is a phenomenal director with a clear vision for what the story needs, and he was immediately drawn to the Data General Dasher, a model that had the ability to swivel, pivot, and tilt up and down. It also had a very low profile where the other ones were mostly boxy and tall. And the Dasher had an amazing deep-blue color. It is the blue that eventually became the iconic color of the severed floor palate. From there, we had a path forward and a direction to build around. To start, we scanned and modeled a 3D file of the computer's housing. The specialists, our prop fabrication vendor, then 3D-printed and cast the housing, including the yokes, adding texture in the finish to resemble the old IBM plastic feel. Sourcing nine matching color CRT televisions, we pulled the tubes out and laid them into the printed housing. Through trial and error, some blown transistors, rerouting power sources, and some hope and prayers, we fabricated the fully functional, interactive Macrodata Refinement (MDR) computer.

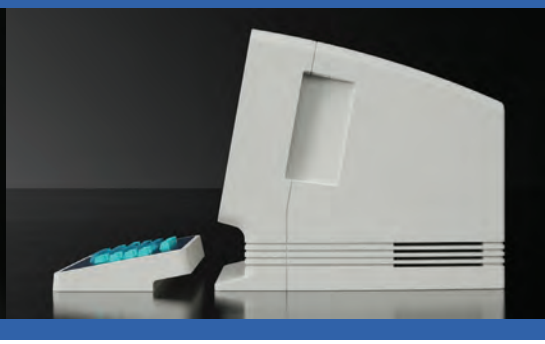
That allowed for a unique opportunity for our actors in that they are actually "refining numbers" on a real computer program in all the scenes. No laying in screens in post required. We created a fully interactive Unity program, running on an infinite loop capable of being "played" for hours at a time. The actors learned how (and got quite good at) selecting, highlighting, and then binning the numbers. The agitation of the numbers was inspired by a brain

teaser game I used to play in which you searched a grid for the one letter that doesn't belong as time counted down to zero. The floating movement created a heightened sense of panic and unease. The action of refining the numbers grew in importance and was incorporated into many more story points over the two seasons.

Though, of course, a computer screen is only part of the project. One of the greatest examples of being able to support the themes of *Severance* within the prop design was with the MDR keyboards. The keyboard offered an opportunity to add subliminal metaphors by omitting the Escape and Control keys, reinforcing the innies having no option of "escape." It spring-boarded us into creating and planting all sorts of fun Easter eggs into our prop creations. We would be on the lookout for every way to bifurcate an object or split it visually in half like Gemma's Christmas candle, Mark's fish tank, or the handle on the personalized trigger mugs the innies use for the coffee, which split—or severed—the hand in half. These metaphors for the severed consciousnesses are all designed intentionally to support the story and these characters.

The next big prop to tackle was the breakroom table, a subtle, but effective

One of the many computers built for Season 2

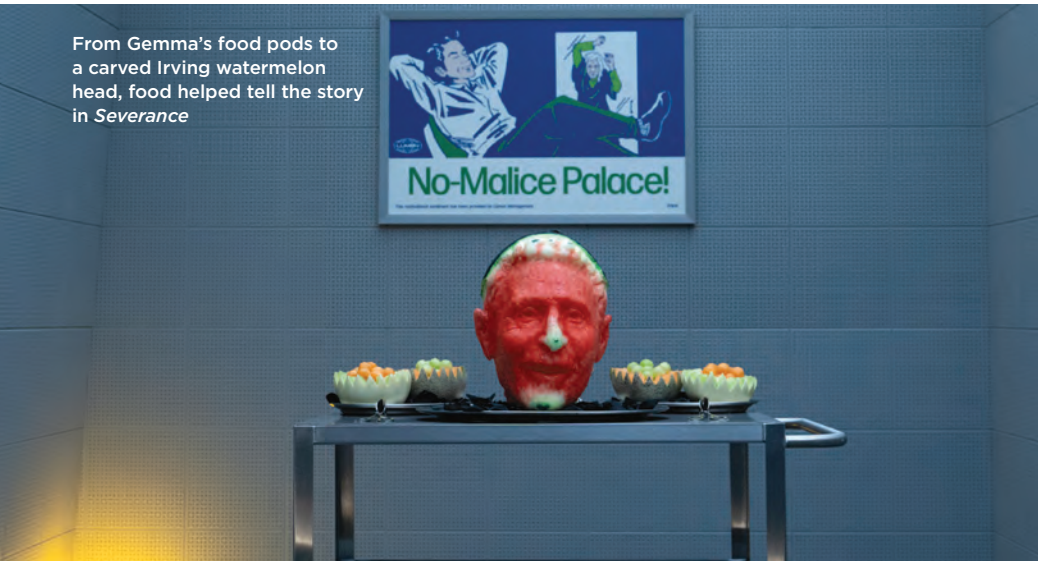


Lumon psychological torture device. To open the conversation about the table's tech, I had brought in a few pieces of retro medical equipment. Of particular interest to Ben was a 1970's Cambridge VS-II portable EKG machine. We decided it should be the anchor of the table's working components. We wanted the device to function and record a printout of an EKG tracing as it originally did on thermal transfer rolls. The unit required an input signal, so I strapped an EKG simulator under the table and attached it to the Cambridge's leeds. There was much duct tape involved. The overhead projector was a vintage German model, and we could only find one that functioned and one that was defunct to build from. We rewired the functional one, adding a more powerful bulb. The cracked lens was swapped out, and the power cables had to be run under the bottom of the table to the power source. I designed the control panel to the right of the projector to have a mini-cassette player, a retractable microphone, power switches, and volume monitors. For Milchick's now iconic headphones, Ben chose from a lineup of headphones that included the winner, Sennheiser HD 414, reminding him of the ones he had in his childhood. The focal point of the rig was the four-foot-tall tempered glass mounted onto the table skinned with rear projector screen film. The glass caught the text projected off a transparency from the overhead projection. So, the projection was entirely practical onto the glass. A proud prop moment of completely practical functionality.

Season 2 brought a whole new set of challenges. One of the greatest was that I was heavily involved in realizing the what and how of reintegration—the process of joining the outie and the innie consciousnesses. Not only how it visually looked but also the justification of how it worked. With a deep dive into the world of brain waves, consciousness, and transcranial magnetic stimulation, we consulted with a few experts, including Dr. Vijay Agrawal, *Severance*'s neurosurgeon tech advisor, along with a Harvard professor at the cutting edge of brain wave research. With a reference

Reintegration homespun transcranial magnetic extinguisher

photo of the first experimental TMS trials as a starting point, I made our own homespun version. After much R&D, the best visual to describe the bifurcated brainwaves was through practical oscilloscopes. The CRTs of the oscilloscopes fit into our retro aesthetic, yet are still used for some applications today. I sourced and collected 12 vintage oscilloscopes and got them up and running, so we were able to input a "score" of dual wave form designs feeding into each scope from an off-camera setup. Adding another graphic visual was the Chladni plate in which the salt crystals vibrated randomly until a certain wave length was reached. Specific frequencies generating specific



From Gemma's food pods to a carved Irving watermelon head, food helped tell the story in *Severance*

vibrations formed instantly into specific shape patterns on the plate. After a preview, Ben saw the arresting visual and added it as a beat in the sequence. The wave forms for the oscilloscopes and the frequencies needed to vibrate the salt patterns on the Chladni, plate were all generated practically. I remain proud to have contributed to the "science" behind a pivotal plot point of reintegration and achieve those visuals practically with no VFX help.

Additionally, when we meet new refiners in MDR this season, I was encouraged to create incentives and perks that the refiners could have brought with them from their respective branches. We had our prop illustrator create a silhouette portrait for Gwendolyn instead of the caricatures featured on Dylan's desk. There is a nine-sided die with the core principles on it. We made a Dario wooden head cube, as he was from a very "poor" branch to counter the sleek Mark crystal cube. Ben and Dan wrote some of these prop creations into the scenes and gave the Dario head cube an extra moment when Dylan returned to his desk questioning the piece and tossing it aside.

This season, we also got to expand our world and build an entirely new world on Gemma's testing floor. We were no longer tied into the retro aesthetic and had to find a whole new language that described Lumon's most cherished experiments. We were able to create a suite that served dual objectives as both jail and safe space. Within the super minimalist aesthetic, we created a medical suite, 60 books bound with custom dyed leather, a food system for feeding Gemma that consisted of food pods and a functional cooking stove, among many other elements. All the parts came together to form a disturbing residence suite for Gemma in her captivity.

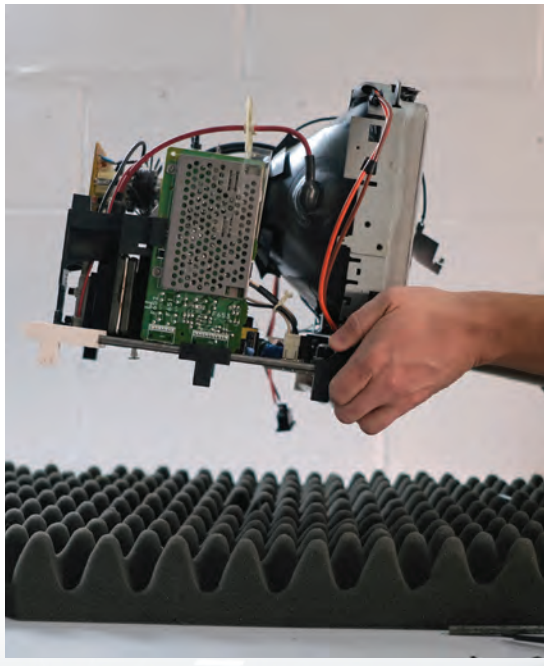
Born from that, the Woe Meter was an exciting Gemma suite build. Holding hand-carved conductive rocks, Gemma answers a series of questions while a device records her biofeedback with lights, moving meters, and dials. Essentially measuring her woe. We concepted it and made a 3D model, finally CNC'ing it out of steel. We then powder-coated the piece and added dials scavenged off old Nagras. Last, we laid in motors to steer the needles of the gauges and remote relays for the lighting changes. It was all controlled via an off-camera app.

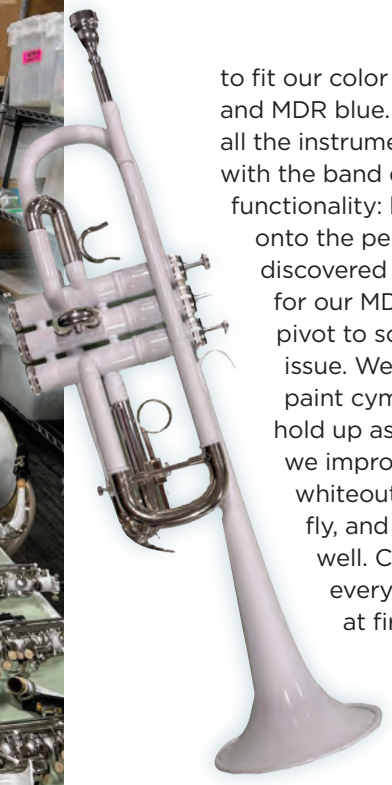
Another big Gemma suite build is the telescoping fluoroscope, among the many props concept illustrated by Eric Fehlberg. It was movable up and down and counterweighted for the least possible resistance as the actor engaged with it. The specialists engineered the functionality and fabricated the rig. Each arm of it weighed hundreds of pounds yet moved with ease.

A fan favorite from Season 2 is Irving's carved watermelon head. The theme of melon as a corporate employee reward had been running through the story since the first episode of Season 1. Each time melon was introduced to the story, it was important to up the ante making each instance visually deeper and stranger. The Irving watermelon head was the next evolution. As a twisted homage to Irving's death, Lumon offered up a meticulously carved watermelon Irving

bust. Our sculptor, Penko Platikanov, experimented for weeks to carve a high-fidelity version of Irving out of watermelon but failed to get it detailed enough as the high water content made it turn to mush. Next, he tried to make it out of foam. I was skeptical that foam could look realistic, but he said come back tomorrow. The next day I was blown away. He had achieved a real watermelon look from foam and lacquer. I couldn't believe how good it looked.

And the goats. Oh, the goats! Mammalians Nurturable was one of the first new sets we shot for Season 2. Covering a large portion of a Brooklyn golf course with the largest free-standing tent in the country (with no support poles), Jeremy designed a severed floor "room" hanging lights off the tent grid and building in walls around the perimeter. In our story, the room serves as a sanctuary for the goats, and it required actual goats and lots of them. We wanted the goats to be on the smaller side, babies and pygmies. Our amazing property team (who are incredible and believe so deeply in the work) and I spent a week setting up an annex pen in the golf course adjacent to our set. We had to reinforce the eight-foot chain-link fence—none of us really knew how





determined a herd of goats might be to play a round of golf in the middle of the night. We then constructed a fenced "road" for the goats to travel from their pen into the set. We had 60 goats who lived on the golf course over the three-day shoot, and the goats were on the set for our whole shooting days. They ate anything in sight, including Technocrane cables and shoe laces. They held no regard for hitting their marks or stealing a scene from the actors with a very noticeable cross. They would not stay quiet while we were rolling. And the whole crew adored them, loving every minute of their shenanigans.

For the last episode of the season, we auditioned many baby goats for the part of Emile and landed on a snow-white bona fide movie star. The goat, whose actual name was Peggy, was uncannily good in their role as the sacrificial goat that is saved in the end. Can we get an Emmy for Peggy, please?

One of the largest undertakings of the season was the massive 100-person choreography and merriment marching band requiring us to source marching band instruments and altering them to fit our color palette of white, silver, and MDR blue. We powder-coated all the instruments working closely with the band director to learn about functionality: how they are strapped onto the performers, and we quickly discovered the tubas were too tall for our MDR ceiling height. A swift pivot to sousaphones solved that issue. We learned if you spray paint cymbals, the paint doesn't hold up as they crash together, so we improvised with Old School whiteout to cover chips on the fly, and it worked surprisingly well. Customizing and branding every instrument seemed, at first, like an arduous undertaking but then made perfect sense when the visual of the Lumon-sponsored marching came together in a crescendo in the finale.

The Mark face balloon has become the iconic image for Season 2's marketing campaigns and posters. For Apple's rollout of the season, I was consulted by the marketing and PR teams to provide show props for numerous pop ups, activations, and comic conventions. We recreated the MDR desk and computers, giving fans a chance to sit and interact with the actual computers and keyboards. Seeing firsthand the engagement of the fans has been a career highlight. The series has generated superfans who are particularly devoted to the props and recreate each and every prop with the highest of fidelity and attention to detail. I'm truly humbled and in awe of their many talents.

What remains the most unique aspect of working on *Severance* is the opportunity to contribute to the storytelling through the objects we build. Myself and my awesome prop family, and extended family of collaborators and fabricators, strive daily to deepen our contribution to the show. There have been instances of me and the team coming up with prop ideas, showing them to Ben, and having him laugh, shake his head, and admit, "Now, I have to shoot an insert for this." And I think that is a win for storytelling and props everywhere.

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THE DEVIL'S IN THE DETAILS:

THE PROPS OF *SINNERS*

BY LAUREN SHELL

At a time when going to the theater to watch a new film typically consists of sequels or spinoffs, Ryan Coogler's newest film, *Sinners*, offers a surprising reprieve from the banal. Its genre is difficult to define. What does one call a period, gangster, vampire musical? And it's that enigma that had me leaving the theater in giddy awe of this film. *Sinners* is unlike anything else I have ever seen before, and it has been a long time since I've been able to say that about any movie. I was able to reach out to the film's Property Master, Douglas Ware, to discuss his work and gain some insight into the process of creating such a remarkable movie.

Many of us are used to seeing films where one actor plays their own twin. In the past, these films used body doubles and locked off cameras to film split screens when the twins share the same space. However, one of the first things I noticed in *Sinners*, was when Smoke and Stack, played by Michael B. Jordan, shared a cigarette back-and-forth while facing the camera. It turns out that a special camera rig called the Halo was created specifically for this film. It's a ring of 10-12 cameras that Jordan wore, captured his facial performance, and then was superimposed onto a body

double. The Halo is a brand-new form of technology that allows for props to be seemingly passed back-and-forth between the twins without the need for split-screen performances. Despite the incredible amount of work that this type of filming must create for an actor, Ware confirmed that Jordan was easy to work with and was very involved in creating the individual props desired for the unique twins. As most Property Masters can attest to, though most moviegoers are unaware of, actors often make requests for personal props that they carry on their person but are almost never seen on camera. These types of requests can vary greatly depending on the actor. Smoke carried a gold lighter which we saw used on screen, but Jordan also requested that Stack carry a silver lighter and two silver half dollars in his pocket. Even though these items weren't written in the script, Ware provided them for Jordan, which is arguably the most important part of being a Property Master: helping actors create characters.

As can be expected in a film set in the South during the 1930s, segregation plays a big part. However, the props turned out to be quite subtle. Coogler requested that the art and Property Departments look over Eudora Welty's book, *Photographs*, to gain a better insight into the times. Ware says that it became obvious that people just didn't carry around as much as they do now,

so his prop work became all about adding subtle touches here and there. He and Costume Designer Ruth Carter came to the agreement that only the ladies on the white side of the street would carry purses, while the ladies on the black side of the street would carry coin purses or baskets. Men on the white side were reading newspapers or carrying luggage for the hotel, while the men and women on the black side were carrying Bibles or purchasing fish from the back of trucks. These moments were only briefly captured on camera when the owner of CHOWS grocery crossed the street, but it was an accurate portrayal of that time period and how a segregated street would have functioned.

Speaking of Chows grocery, I would be remiss if I did not mention the use of Chinese immigrants in *Sinners*. Having been born and raised in the South myself, I am keenly aware of its history of slavery and segregation. Something many people may not know, however, is the large population of Chinese immigrants that also lived in the Mississippi Delta during this time. It is not a part of history that typically gets covered in school, so imagine my surprise when this little-known minority group popped up on the screen. I actually gripped the wrist of my friend who was at the theater with me because I got so excited to see this group represented. Chows had a white grocery and a black grocery on the main city street and, as the actor crossed that street, you can watch as the props change from one type to another. Ware praised production designer Hannah Beachler and set decorator Monique Champagne for creating the rich environments for the two distinct shops. He said they made it easy to complement their designs by seamlessly integrating the props throughout the scene. He enjoyed those scenes along the street because it gave him a chance to "stay true to the feel of the Mississippi Delta at that time and not overpopulate the world with just stuff and things."

One of the key elements in this story centers around music. The history of music during this time period is packed with historical import. The blues was born of a time in the late 1800s after the Emancipation Act of 1863 and was a mixture of many types of music, including the Afro-American spirituals and the call and response chants of native African tribal music. This musical history was really portrayed well on screen and became the main focal point for the second half of the film. The hero prop of the movie, Sammie's resonator guitar, went through many iterations before the final prop was selected. Coogler always knew that he wanted some sort of resonator, but the original plan was for it to be haint blue. This color is particularly popular in the South and was used especially during that time period by the Gullah Geechee people. It is a color painted onto porches and window trim to ward off evil spirits. Ware sent off two Hound Dog resonator guitars to get painted haint blue. However, it was later decided

that they wanted to go with a vintage 1932 Dobro resonator that was already owned by the film's composer, Ludwig Göransson. Coogler liked the look of the original black, so the haint blue idea was scrapped. Ware said that they were aware of the artistic license they were taking by using this guitar because historically, it was created the same year that the film took place, but Coogler liked that guitar best, so it's what they went with.

Not only was that guitar a challenge, but the incredible juke joint musical scene also proved to be difficult. There is a moment when Sammie's music is so powerful that it opens the realm of the ancestors and calls the spirits of musicians forth from both the past and the future. We see native African tribesmen, Chinese opera singers, '80s rock guitarists, modern-day rappers, and even a DJ. These musicians were all playing their instruments and Ware said that the African tribal instruments were the most difficult to find. However, that was not the hardest part of that sequence. Because the scene was shot in a oner (meaning there were no cuts between the various portions of the dance sequence), Ware had to come up with a clever way of getting the DJ setup onto the stage without being seen. He suggested that he and a few other crew members dress in costume so that when the camera was turned, they could move the DJ table into place without having to duck and hide when the camera turned back toward them. After a few takes, they nailed the move, and I think it turned out beautifully.

Obviously, another important element of this film is the supernatural. It comes in a couple different forms but was really brought to life through the character of Annie, played by Wunmi Mosaku. Her character practices the art of Hoodoo, and she brings the knowledge of the supernatural not only to the other characters, but to the audience as well. We first see Annie in her shop in the woods where we learn about the mojo bag she's given Smoke. Originally, the mojo bag was going to be haint blue as well and made out of burlap. It simply hung around Smoke's neck and was never opened. It was later decided that they would open it and need to see the contents. Ware went on a hunt to find multiple different styles of handmade bags until Coogler settled on the black one that we see on screen. Early during prep, Coogler brought in Hoodoo expert Dr. Yvonne Patricia Chireau to advise the production team and Ware consulted with her on the best items for the mojo bag, as well as other elements throughout the film such as the throwing of bones in the juke joint. That scene in particular was a last-minute addition with Coogler requesting chicken bones and other items and Chireau was called just before cameras rolled to make sure that everything was correct. Property Masters often employ the talents of

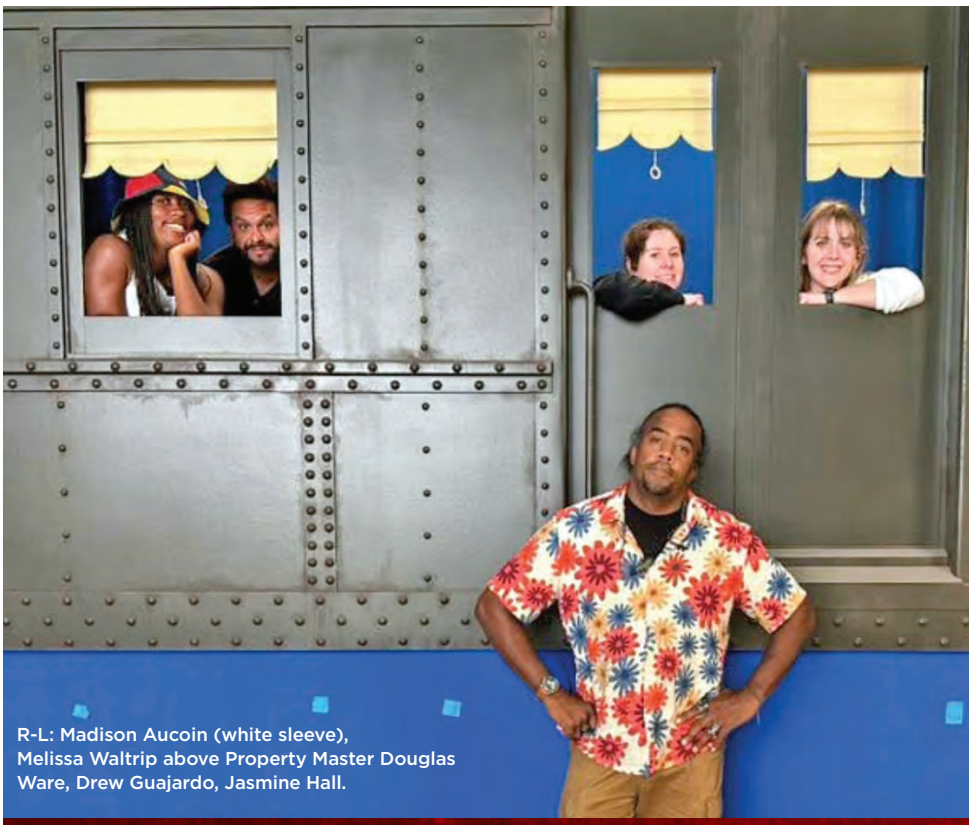
advisors for moments like this in order to provide authenticity and accuracy to a scene.

Annie's knowledge of vampires is what leads to another fun moment in the script where everyone must eat a clove of garlic to prove they are not one. Ware gave his food stylist, Kendall Gensler, a few weeks' notice on the upcoming prop, and she created the garlic cloves from white chocolate. It turned out to be very rich apparently, but it looked perfect on camera and made sure that no one had to chow down on the real thing.

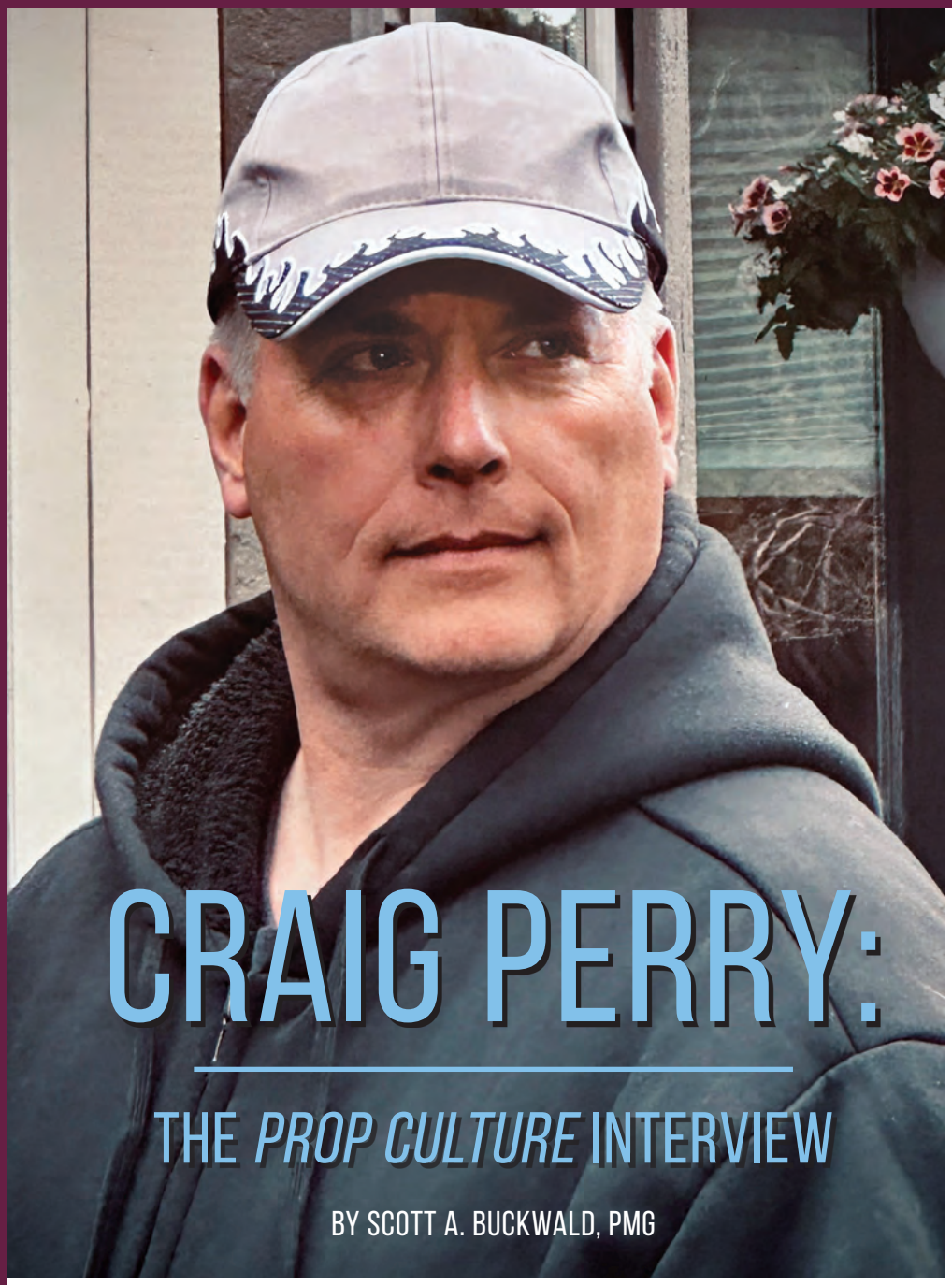
What is a period, gangster, vampire musical without some weapons? Throughout the movie, we get glimpses of Smoke and Stack's World War

I weaponry such as Stack's trench knife and German Luger, but they all culminate in the final shoot-out scene at the end of the film. Coogler always knew he wanted a Tommy gun for that final scene, so Ware set Jordan up with a weapons specialist from Independent Studio Services to teach him all the ins and outs of the weapons. Jordan practiced quickly loading, firing, and reloading both the Tommy gun and the Browning BAR for a few weeks leading up to filming. The work clearly paid off because the authenticity of this moment, which was filmed in slow motion, looked incredible on screen. But one of Ware's favorite props was the trunk that the brothers shared during their time in the war. The script mentioned the trunk and that Smoke opens it, but it didn't specifically mention anything inside, so it was up to the Property Department to build it out. Ware said that, "We thought about what else would be in there. Smoke and Stack shared the box so there were personal items in there for both brothers. Two helmets. Two wool Army blankets. Two bayonets. Basic stuff. But then we added a stack of mail. A photo of the 369th Infantry. A locket with a picture of their mother. There was a World War 1 victory medal, as well as a 1914 Christmas box. We wanted to show the brothers may have traded items with other soldiers. Although we don't see these things clearly, just knowing we gave it history is rewarding." Those sorts of memory boxes that hold growth and love from a character's past that don't necessarily make it onto the screen but provide the actor with a sense of personal history are often the most satisfying sorts of props to make.

In my opinion, *Sinners* is one of the most satisfying films of 2025. It not only created a world surrounding Southern culture during a time of true development, but just for fun, it threw in vampires. The work that Douglas Ware and his team did on this film is absolutely beautiful. The time and care they put into the props is clear and their contribution to world building should not go unnoticed. If you have not had a chance to see this unique film yet, I encourage you to do so. You won't be disappointed.



R-L: Madison Aucoin (white sleeve), Melissa Waltrip above Property Master Douglas Ware, Drew Guajardo, Jasmine Hall.



CRAIG PERRY:

THE *PROP CULTURE* INTERVIEW

BY SCOTT A. BUCKWALD, PMG

Few producers in the film industry demonstrate a deeper understanding of the collaborative nature of storytelling than Craig Perry. From the genre-defining suspense of the *Final Destination* series to the sharp humor and emotional honesty of the *American Pie* franchise, his work highlights a strong sense of tone, structure, and visual storytelling.

Most recently, Craig has returned to the franchise that helped define a generation of horror with *Final Destination: Bloodlines*, the first new entry in the series in 14 years. His thoughtful approach to filmmaking, paired with a genuine appreciation for the artistry behind the details, makes his voice a meaningful and respected addition to this issue.

PROP CULTURE: Craig, it is always a pleasure to connect. We really appreciate you coming to talk with us today.

CRAIG PERRY: Very glad to be here and I think it's emblematic of what people don't know about props, which is why I'm glad that we are speaking and that this magazine exists and that people outside of the inner sanctum can get a real sense of the length and breadth of thought and care that goes into every single prop that every single actor interacts with. This is a valuable opportunity for anyone curious about how props contribute to the stories and films we create.

PROP CULTURE: To that point, one of the primary goals of *Prop Culture* is to demonstrate that the Property Department brings a distinct and meaningful artistic voice to the filmmaking process.

CRAIG PERRY: Let's talk about that for a second, because I think what people often overlook is that props are the conduit between the set and the character. They are the things the actors physically touch and interact with, and they are essential in making that space feel real and the character feel authentic. They are the linchpins. Every department has to communicate with props, because props are with the actors at all times. It is constant. And I think it speaks to exactly what you are saying, the artistic value and absolute necessity of a Property Department that not only cares but is fully invested and integral to bringing the director's vision and the actor's choices to life. Does that seem fair?

PROP CULTURE: That absolutely seems fair, and I am really glad you brought that up. The Property Department is often the most direct link between the actor and the world they are inhabiting. Property Masters must in some ways become characters within the story as well.

CRAIG PERRY: That is exactly right. In this role, you have to be a psychologist, fully stepping into the mindset of the character. But you also have to be a historian. You need to understand what is accurate and specific to the time period and context of the story. Take something as simple as a prop backpack. If a character comes from a different socioeconomic background, they are not going to have the same gear as someone else. Maybe their backpack is secondhand, heavily worn, and dated to late 1986, something they picked up at a thrift shop. There is a whole chain of thought behind why that character walks through the door with that exact item. I also love what Chris Call pointed out in his article about the "Anatomy of a Scene" from *American Pie* (*Prop Culture* issue 1), a prop should feel lived in. A high school kid's backpack should not look empty. Nothing pulls you out of a scene faster than an actor carrying something that clearly has no weight. It looks like it was just handed to them. And I keep going back to *American Pie* because it is

a perfect example of how the smallest details carry real meaning. The magic always comes from the prop trailer. I have always felt like it was an Aladdin's lamp.

PROP CULTURE: That is such a great way to put it. What you are describing is the invisible work that shapes the entire feel of a scene. When it is done right, you do not notice it, because it just feels true. But when it is off, even slightly, it breaks the illusion.

CRAIG PERRY: It is that level of intention that turns a prop into something more than just an object.

PROP CULTURE: Let's turn to *Final Destination: Bloodlines*. The Property Master on the film was Guild member David Dowling.

CRAIG PERRY: He brought an unbelievable level of creative energy to the production, but just as importantly, he kept the financial trains running on time. He managed the department with real precision. We not only got everything we needed and asked for, but he often came to us with additional ideas. Allowing space for his creative instincts to shine. That flexibility and forward-thinking is a big part of why *Final Destination: Bloodlines* became the best version of a *Final Destination* film. David's contributions helped elevate it on every level.

PROP CULTURE: There is a fresh energy to this film. What was your initial vision for the overall look and feel, and how did that vision shape your collaboration with David Dowling?

CRAIG PERRY: One of the things we collectively set out to do with *Final Destination: Bloodlines* was to elevate the entire experience. There was a conscious effort to pay extremely close attention to every detail. Their acute sense of detail translated into making references to the previous movies, so that if you were a fan and you'd seen all the previous movies, this movie itself would be a rich experience. At the same time, we were very deliberate in making sure the film could stand on its own. Even if someone had never seen any of the previous entries, it would still work as a complete and satisfying story. It serves both as a continuation for returning audiences and as an accessible entry point for those new to the franchise. Every department was given the freedom to explore and bake in references to the earlier films. Of course, we had to make sure it never went too far or became too cutesy, but the Property Department in particular, had a field day. They came up with some really fun and interesting callbacks.

PROP CULTURE: What were some of your favorites?

CRAIG PERRY: In the log-in book at the Sky View, the maitre d' is checking, references to characters in other movies and dates from other movies, subtle details exist in the margins. If you are in the know, it becomes a fun experience to see, we are making a call back here.

LICENSE PLATE FROM *FINAL DESTINATION: BLOODLINES*
PHOTO: RINGO

PROP CULTURE: Those little hidden details are a nod of appreciation to the dedicated fan base, like a quiet way of saying, "We see you."

CRAIG PERRY: I bet you didn't notice the license plate on the red Chevy Impala, "FL8-18E," a nod to Flight 180 from the first film. Fans will catch it, but details like this are why I love David Dowling and his team. Spencer, Ringo, the on-set property person, and the entire prop crew clearly had a blast with this. We wanted every department to have that sort of latitude to contribute creatively, but the Property Department really ran with it. This is an example. We had a second unit that needed pennies to fall heads up no matter what. Instead of leaving it to chance, they cut a penny in half, glued it back together with both sides showing heads, and made it work in just three takes. That would not have occurred to me. My instinct would have been to keep shooting and hope it landed right 50 percent of the time. But they thought it through, solved the problem, and made it happen fast. There was a moment where we were shooting the kitchen and the character of Bobby on an improv, starts reaching over and grabbing some grapes that were part of the set dressing and started to eat them. I literally watched Ringo at the monitor see this happen and then immediately pull off his earwig and start walking away. Within 10 minutes, we had two crates of grapes to replace any that needed to be done for continuity. I was like, yes, yes, yes! That is the kind of nimble, responsive, behind-the-scenes work that keeps the production moving. No drama, no questions, no "How could this happen?" just, "What do we need?" and "Let's make it happen."

PROP CULTURE: It is wonderful listening to you because you really remember these moments, and clearly it made an impression on you. It shows how deeply those contributions matter.

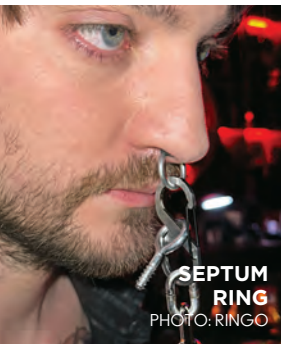
CRAIG PERRY: He was doing his job, thinking ahead, and anticipating what might be needed. That is another thing I think the Property Department does not get enough kudos for. You always have to plan for multiples.

PROP CULTURE: One is none!

CRAIG PERRY: Which is totally true! The *Final Destination* movies in particular,

demand that kind of coordination, because every set piece requires full involvement from props, wardrobe, stunts, makeup, special effects, hair, and cinematography. There is no department that is not essential from the start.

PROP CULTURE: Can you recall what was the most challenging prop-related problem that had to be solved during the production of *Bloodlines*?


SEPTUM RING
PHOTO: RINGO

CRAIG PERRY: Let me tell you, the tattoo parlor scene looks simple on screen, just one guy in a room. But it was a major challenge. From a props' perspective, it started with the septum ring. The actor did not have one, so props had to work with makeup to create a believable piece that could connect to a chain rigged inside the set. David Dowling and I spent a lot of time figuring out the weight and gauge of that chain, so it felt real and heavy enough to sell the moment, but not so much that it looked unsafe. Once we had that solved, we had to reverse engineer the design. Production design incorporated multiple chains of the same type, so it blended into the set and did not feel like a setup for a single gag. Props then fabricated a plastic version of the chain with magnets, since the actor would be holding and interacting with it. Special effects added magnetic components to the fan so the chain could loop around it and stay in place but still fall safely when needed.

PROP CULTURE: Once again, working on a film set is a collaborative effort!

CRAIG PERRY: Every department had to be involved. Even with all of that, 36 hours before shooting, we still did not have a safe, workable solution to attach the septum ring to the actor. I had been advocating for the scene for a long time, so the directors turned to me and asked, "What do you have?" I remembered Lon Chaney in *Phantom of the Opera* using pacifier nipples inside his nose to alter his face. That sparked an idea. What if we used small inserts inside the actor's nose, not to distort, but to anchor a hidden connector?

AMERICAN PIE

We trimmed the actor's nose hair, used those inserts, and props and makeup collaborated to 3-D print a custom hinge that attached to the inner hook. The actor could then control the pull of the ring himself, just out of frame, which made the shot look disturbingly real. I sketched the idea and brought it to stunts first. They approved it. Makeup effects refined the adhesive, and we tested it on the stunt performer. The morning of the shoot, we fit the final version on the actor. And it worked. It was every department working together. Once the path was clear, everyone jumped in. That is how these films get made. If one department fails, the whole thing falls apart. But when everyone is all in, the result speaks for itself.

PROP CULTURE: That is incredible. It really shows how true collaboration across departments is what brings a moment like that to life.

CRAIG PERRY: Movies are too hard to make if you don't.

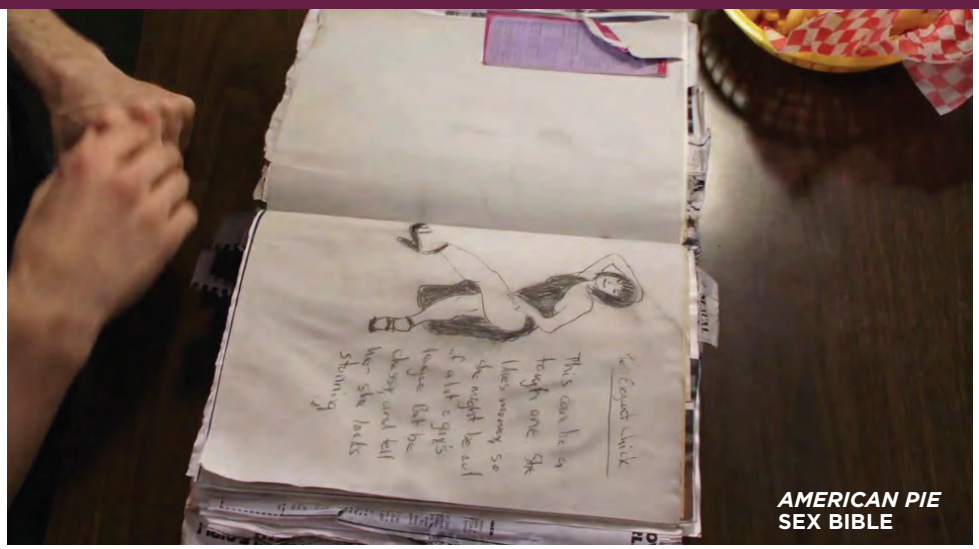
PROP CULTURE: So, shifting gears a bit, let's talk about the *American Pie* movies. They're a very different kind of project, tonally, thematically, and culturally from the *Final Destination* series.

CRAIG PERRY: Yes!

PROP CULTURE: To a lot of moviegoers, that pie has become burned into pop culture. Can you recall the process of choosing the pie?

CRAIG PERRY: It is the title of the movie. Well, it became the title of the movie. We didn't know at the time it was going to be. In fact, when we were getting the script ready to take to the marketplace, about two days before submitting it to places to read, we added the pie scene. It didn't

AMERICAN PIE



***AMERICAN PIE* SEX BIBLE**

exist in the finished script. We just felt there was a section that did not have a big belly laugh. You could cut the pie scene entirely. You cut the setup of Jim saying, "What's it like?" "Warm apple pie," and then you cut Eugene Levy's ad lib, "Well, better than baked goods." All that you could lose, and it does not change a single character arc. It does not change the trajectory of the story at all. It is literally a nonnarrative element. But because it was so audacious, because remember, he gets humiliated at school, which impacts his prom dates because of what happens with Nadia, it has nothing to do with this pie scene. It is irrelevant. We had no idea what this was going to deliver. We just figured it is pretty gross, it is pretty funny, like you could see a teenage kid doing that.

PROP CULTURE: So, it ended up becoming the thing everyone remembers, even though it wasn't part of the original plan.

CRAIG PERRY: As Chris Call pointed out, there was a lot of debate about pies. But remember, we did not have a lot of time or money. So, we just had to be strategic, and I think that the Costco pie, where it landed, had several functions. There were multiples that all looked the same, so there was never going to be too much of a continuity challenge. And the way the lattice work was laid into the pie, you could imagine insertion without hesitation, if that makes sense.

PROP CULTURE: And the lattice work gives it that classic 1940s grandma's pie-on-the-windowsill look, like something out of a Norman Rockwell painting.

CRAIG PERRY: This is exactly why that was the right choice, because it had a nostalgic factor to it. It's his mom's pie, and he's going to … sordidly debase himself by wrecking it with his … well, never mind. You know what I'm saying! When you buy the Costco pies, they are cost-effective, because also, as Chris mentioned, there were many, many pies needed.

***BOTTOM AND CENTER: FINAL DESTINATION: BLOODLINES* NOMICON BOOK.**
PHOTO: RINGO

PROP CULTURE: Are there any other props from *American Pie* that remain near and dear to you?

CRAIG PERRY: You know, there are two things. I always loved this Sears catalog Levinson family photo with Jason and his mom and dad. But the prop that I wish I had was the sort of amalgamated hand version of the sex bible they had hidden underneath the floorboards. That's what I really wish I had a copy of.

PROP CULTURE: You should have rescued that book before it got lost forever in studio storage!

CRAIG PERRY: Now … I may or may not have the handmade hero death Nomicon book that was used by Stephanie in *Bloodlines* with the penny still taped onto the front page. That is real on screen. But when you pull it out and it actually is in front of people, suddenly that thing, the magic of movies, becomes real to them. I pulled out the book and there was an audience of 300 people that gasped. And to me, when a prop can elicit that kind of reaction from an audience when it is presented in reality, why would we ever want to have it in studio storage?

PROP CULTURE: The Property Masters Guild has been participating at WonderCon and setting up a prop museum showcasing iconic props. It gives fans a chance to get up close and personal with real pieces of cinematic history.

CRAIG PERRY: When we had our publicity junket, I may or may not have brought a certain book that we were just talking about to show the reporters, and they lost their minds. They all wanted to take a selfie with it. That was another collaboration between the prop department and Wenke Li, who was one of the graphic designers in the art department. She hand drew every single page of seven copies of that book.

PROP CULTURE: How about a special prop from something you did not produce? Are there any props from movie history that stand out as something you would like to one day own?

CRAIG PERRY: I think it would be one of two things. It would be one of Freddy Krueger's gloves with the knives or the Hellraiser cube. There is something so ingenious about those movies. If you think about the opening credits for *Nightmare on Elm Street*, where you see those gloves getting made and forged, there is so much nostalgia behind that. And it would be something you could actually put your hand into, move it, and just be transported into what that movie made you feel. For the *Hellraiser* cube, just because it is beautiful. It is so beautifully done.

PROP CULTURE: I love that you picked pieces that are more than just props but are actually characters themselves.

CRAIG PERRY: There's a reason why there are traveling tours of costumes and props. Because it's an indescribable feeling when something that is only lived in your imagination shows up in your life. I can't even find the words to describe what it means for people to hold and look at it and see them. They're not theoretical, they are actual! As a Property Master, you know, the blood, sweat, and tears that went into creating it.

PROP CULTURE: Of course!

CRAIG PERRY: You feel it. You feel it in the actual prop; you feel that authenticity. It has to feel lived in, real. See, now we are getting mushy, but it is so true. I think that is why Property Masters love what they do, because when you crack the code to make something not just feel real, but make it authentic through the blood, sweat, and tears you put into it, whether it is sourcing historically accurate elements or adding a subtle detail no one else would notice but you... Cool, that is awesome!

NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET

HELLRAISER

PROP CULTURE: There cannot be a better note to go out on than that! Craig, again thank you so much for all the support and taking the time with us!

CRAIG PERRY: It was such a pleasure and if you need a magazine centerfold, I'll be your first centerfold!

FINAL DESTINATION: BLOODLINES

HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON

BY DAVID CHEESMAN, PMG

Dominic Watkins, the production designer, rang to say, do you want to do *How to Train Your Dragon* and in Northern Ireland? Firstly, one of my favourite animations with incredible lighting from Roger Deakins, it always felt like an animation with a film style, so it was very exciting to think we could be part of bringing it into a live-action version.

The Property Department was heavily involved in shaping the look of the film with everything from the wings and saddles to staffs and toys. While children's toys were not something from the original animation, I thought it was an important addition to world-building this community of Vikings and how integrated fighting was to them at even a young age. I had been following an automation engineer for some time online and thought it would be lovely to create a small dragon for Hiccup. We also did a ship and whale, as well as tiny shields and swords for the kids watching the trials in the arena. It was those extra elements that helped add realism and depth to our world. Everyone put a little extra effort into everything because of Dean DeBlois. It was his first time directing, and you really wanted his dream to be a reality, and the experience to be something special.

Working on adapting the film's design from animation to live action created unique challenges to extrapolate the intention and feel of the original while building on it to add realism and avoid direct copies. We had to reinvent. Generally, I made three concepts. One was an exact copy of the animation, but real, losing the cute side of the animation. Then the second pushed the idea further to see how much Dean would allow. Sometimes he agreed and other times he said we should stick closer to the original as fans will want it to be the same but cooler.

Similarly, with Toothless' fin, early on we realised that the animation shape wouldn't articulate naturally as the rods weren't evenly spaced. So, we created the leather shape everyone would remember and then added the rods after. We had a real blacksmith create the steel, and we copied it in lightweight material so Mason could handle it properly since the real one was incredibly heavy. With Toothless' saddle, we made about six different versions as Hiccup slowly adapted the design. Then we had to make them all again for the gimbal unit as it became clear that it needed to bend and shift around the gimbal due to its amazing articulation.

The thing I remember the most due to the personal nature of it were designing and making the prosthetics. To get started, we had an open call for anyone who wanted to be part of the film to come in and over several meetings and fittings, we created many different Viking prosthesis. In doing so, we met Steven Robinson, a prosthetist engineer, and Lynne Mckinley, a clinical lead prosthetist specialist from the Musgrave Clinic Belfast who guided us at every step. By the end, we all were able to get over our sensitivity to what we were trying to do and became this gang that ended up having so much fun. I will never forget the look on a guy's face who didn't really wear his own arm prosthesis much, but when he came out in costume, and we fitted his battle axe arm, his face lit up, and he roared like a Viking. At the end, just for fun, we ended up making small versions of them for everyone who took part in the film as a memento.

At 28 feet, the Mangler was a fully-functional technical marvel.

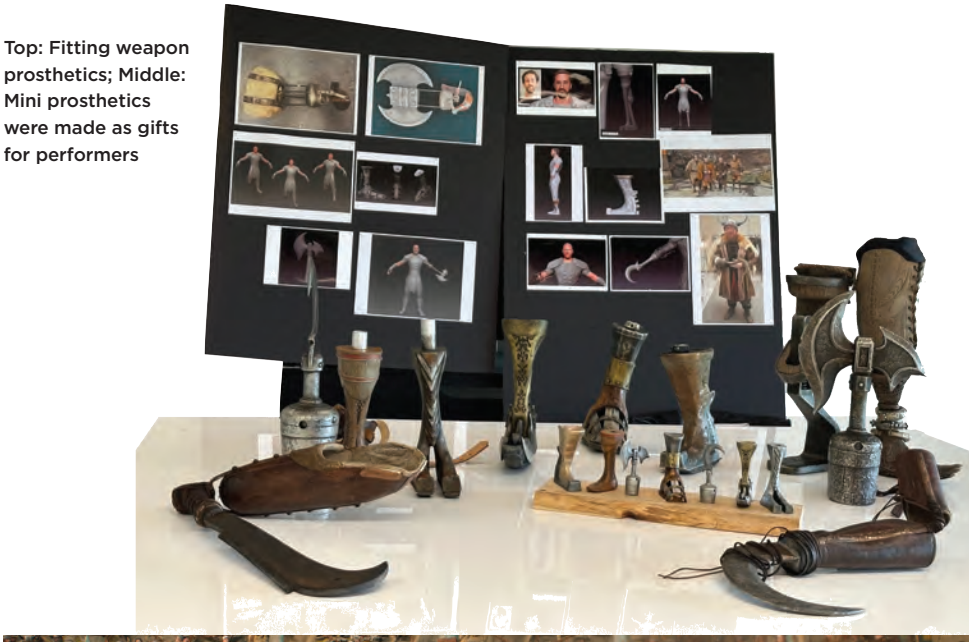
From the personal to the technical with the Mangler, we knew from the animation it needed to run around the village square and up a hillside and open and articulate then fire. With animation, weight is never an issue, and size can be cheated depending on the scene. However, in real life, you have to stick to the rules and have the viewer believe it all, so Toothless at 28 feet long or Mason's height, all had to be factored in when making everything. With the animation, it doesn't need to make sense, only look good. However, we had to create it in the real world for the audience to believe. We had weight issues and had to deal with the speed of opening, which also had issues. We could apply large actuators that were strong, but

slow or we could go small and fast. We ended up finding a middle ground that could open quickly and VFX could speed up. Otherwise, we would have ripped the body from the base. I'm proud to say that the whole thing was completely practical and could fire safely.

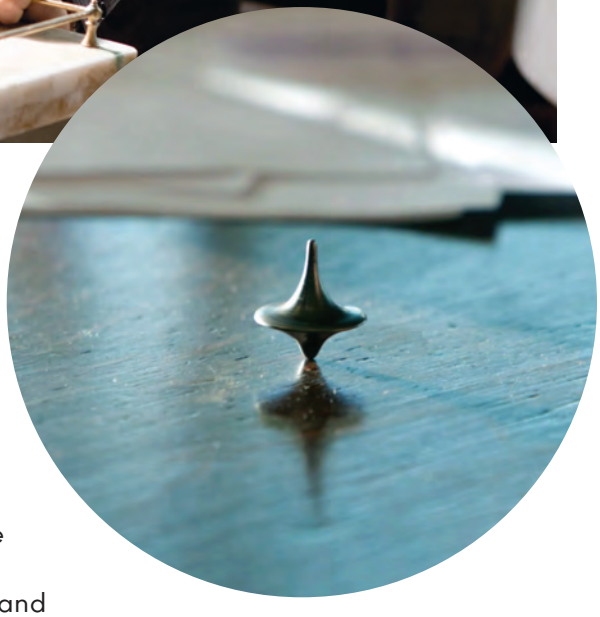
Lastly, the impossible task of making the *Book of Dragons*. We were told by the industry that it was too big, no one had machinery that could make it. The paper chosen was from Japan, and you couldn't get enough in time. In the animation, it's a lot smaller. When we met with Dean and discussed size with a sample of old books, he loved the idea of this incredible book and its massive size. So, a bit blindly, we started to work on the idea. We had the paper created for us in Tokyo and shipped to Belfast and met with various bookbinders until one was up for the challenge. The binding press we ended up using was a 5-tonne car press.

For the drawings of the dragons in the book, we had five artists do tests approximately three times. Dean liked Laura Manditch's style the best so, all the dragons are from her. Hundreds of hours of artwork by Laura were constantly adjusted. Early on, we kept to the animation style then Dominic, the production designer, said we should go back over everyone and make "real, dangerous, and believable." Who knew that every dragon has a horn on its head, Dean would reveal. Papers were hand-painted. Sigils were all done by hand. 656 pages. The book was almost a meter wide in one sheet, and half a meter tall weighing 17 KG. Eight months later, we finally had it together.

The work of Chloe Frizzell, my assistant, and the constant support of Kostas Wardle, my Prop Maker, who has to figure out the crazy ideas we come up with, were essential to the project. We are very proud when you're told it can't be done in this industry. Sometimes that is the moment you have to take the challenge because, in the end, it's where real magic is.



Top: Fitting weapon prosthetics; Middle: Mini prosthetics were made as gifts for performers



INCEPTION

In *Inception*, the spinning top is a totem used by Dom Cobb to distinguish dreams from reality. If it falls, he is awake. If it keeps spinning, he is still dreaming. The top belonged to his late wife, Mal, whose presence lingers throughout the film. She acts as both memory and threat, challenging Cobb's grasp on reality. He relies on the top to ground himself as he navigates unstable perceptions.

In the final scene, Cobb returns home and sees his children. The top spins, begins to wobble, but the screen cuts to black before it falls. The moment leaves viewers suspended between illusion and truth. The top remains one of modern cinema's most iconic symbols.

Fun fact: The "wobbling top" was a happy accident. Property Master Scott Maginnis oversaw the creation of all totems, including Mal's. Multiple tops were made to spin flawlessly. The day before filming the final scene, Assistant Property Master Erick Garibay tested them. One fell on concrete, creating a subtle imperfection. The damage caused the top to spin slightly off-center.

The next morning, Christopher Nolan asked if the top could spin imperfectly. Serendipitously, the result became the signature "wobbling top," the ambiguous image that ends the film and secures its legacy.

Property Master: Scott Maginnis

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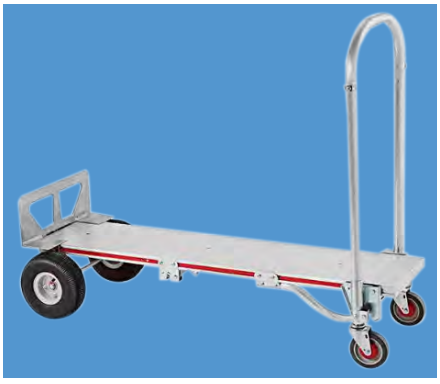

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